

Building a Network of Legal First Responders

In communities across America, a tragic reality plays out daily: 92% of people facing legal issues do not have the legal support that they need. They handle issues alone, navigating life-altering cases like evictions, custody battles, and debt cases without the critical benefit of an attorney. Meanwhile, there are 5,000 people living in poverty for every one free attorney available to help them.

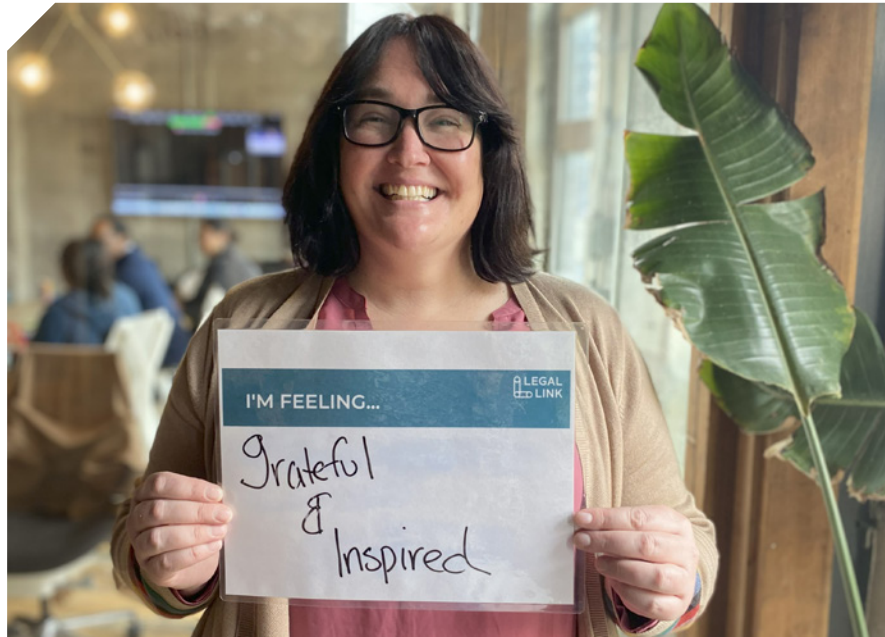
Kate Crowley Richardson has spent 13 years as a public interest lawyer witnessing this broken system firsthand. “The legal system is completely broken in that people don’t understand what their legal rights are, can’t access legal protections, and don’t know how to find help,” she explains.

This realization led Richardson to join Legal Link, an Oakland-based anti-poverty organization that’s revolutionizing how legal representation reaches vulnerable communities. Rather than adding more lawyers to an already overwhelmed system, Legal Link trains a new kind of frontline worker.

Legal Link’s breakthrough approach centers on their trademarked Legal First Aid® curriculum. Just as medical emergencies require more than surgeons – with EMTs, nurses, and community health workers forming crucial support layers – legal crises need a similar ecosystem. “In the legal world we basically only have the equivalent of surgeons,” Richardson notes.

The organization identifies trusted community partners – housing case managers, social workers, community health workers – and trains them to spot legal issues before they become crises. These aren’t aspiring lawyers; they’re existing frontline workers trained to recognize when life problems have legal solutions.

Take the housing voucher discrimination case Richardson describes: a major San Francisco organization serving homeless clients discovered through Legal Link training that landlords cannot discriminate against tenants because they are paying their rent with a voucher. “That law existed,



“Legal First Aid® training with Legal Link has helped me keep more families stably housed while transforming me as a professional. I’ve seen how sharing legal knowledge strengthens the power already within our clients, giving me hope we can transform how the law impacts low-income communities.”

– Melanie Young,
Housing Advocate

but frontline providers weren’t aware of the protection,” Richardson explains. Armed with this knowledge, staff helped educate landlords about the law and their clients secured housing before their vouchers expired.

The model works because it meets people where they are. “86% of people experiencing legal issues don’t recognize their issues as legal problems, Richardson explains. “And even when they do, they don’t turn to lawyers.” Instead, they seek help at food banks, community clinics, and social service agencies – exactly where Legal Link trains frontline providers.

Melanie Young, a housing advocate at San Francisco’s Homeless Prenatal Program, completed Legal Link’s

fellowship and now creates specialized training for domestic violence survivors and immigrants. Young recently helped a formerly incarcerated client eliminate \$60,000 in wrongfully accumulated child support debt.

Legal Link has already trained over 2,000 community advocates across Northern California. With a refined model proving effective, the organization is poised for national expansion. “We now have a model that we know is tested and effective, and we found a way to scale it sustainably,” Richardson says.

As Richardson puts it: “The law should belong to the people.” Legal Link is making that radical idea a practical reality, one trained advocate at a time.

Join the Legal First Aid® Movement

Help Legal Link train 2,000 more frontline legal advocates over the next three years. For \$500, you can ensure one community health worker, housing case manager, or social worker receives Legal First Aid® certification – multiplying their ability to help families avoid eviction, escape domestic violence, and access benefits. These trained advocates resolve 80% of legal issues they encounter, preventing crises before they require costly emergency interventions.



Legal Link’s mission is to remove legal barriers that prolong poverty by adding critically needed capacity to the legal ecosystem. We are training and supporting a new frontline of Legal First Aid responders.



Legal Link team on-site at longtime partner Homeless Prenatal Program in San Francisco.



Legal First Aid-trained health providers.

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